

Susanna Blamire

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Susanna Blamire was famously called the Muse of Cumberland and the Poet of Friendship. She was born in 1747 in Cardew Hall, Carlisle, where she would live with her family until 1754. Susanna was the youngest of four children born to William Blamire, a farmer, and Isabella Simpson. At age seven, Susanna would lose her mother and in 1758 her father. Susanna then moved in with her mother's widowed sister, Mary Simpson, in Stockdalewath, Cumbria. Susanna's brother William was a successful naval surgeon, her other brother Richmond was a publisher in London, and her sister Sarah was married to a colonel. Through the help of her siblings, Blamire was able to reach the literary world. She attended school briefly, after which we assume she was taught at home. Blamire was introduced to the circle at Gartmore House¹⁴⁹ in 1767 but started writing well before that. She wrote songs and poems, one of the longest of which is *Stoklewath; or the Cumbrian Village*. This poem is an "ecological poem that celebrates and defends the balance between the human and natural worlds" (Page 385).

But writing was not the only thing Susanna knew how to do: she was also a dancer, and she knew how to play the guitar and recorder, which helped her when she composed her songs in Scots dialect. Susanna worked with prints and manuscripts about medicine, which played a role in "arguing for women's medical education, reimagining the workings of the body, and advocating holistic forms of practice that unite physical and emotional forms of care" (Blackwood). She learned a lot from her surgeon brother William and "she was able to make use of this knowledge by practicing medicine within the local community" (Blackwood). Susanna suffered from rheumatic fever, a chronic illness that shortened her life to age forty-seven. After her first encounter with this disease, there was a shift in Susanna's poetry, changing the direction to a darker side, as in her poem "When Home We Return."

"When Home We Return" is a poem with an anapestic tetrameter meter, categorized as a song. There is no source to tell us when this poem was written, but we can assume it was after Susanna was diagnosed with her illness in her mid-twenties, due to the somber and grey mood of the poem. The audience can assume the speaker of the poem is male because of the

¹⁴⁹ *Gartmore House*: the residence of her sister Sarah's husband Colonel Graham.

mention of “Jessy,” a deceased female partner in line twenty of the poem. The male speaker has mixed emotions about revisiting places from his childhood, revisiting positive memories but also confronting changes he feels negatively about. Near the end of the poem, he changes his thoughts and “wishes [he] had stay’d from [the] country for ever.” Anapestic meters are used for humorous poems and themes, but ironically this poem is the opposite of what the meter is meant to do.

Further Reading

Sullivan, Laurence. “Channelling the Challenges of Chronic Illness: The Poetry of Susanna Blamire.” *TORCH*, 23 Mar. 2022, <https://www.torch.ox.ac.uk/article/channelling-the-challenges-of-chronic-illness-the-poetry-of-susanna-blamire>.

References

- Page, Judith W. “Susanna Blamire’s Ecological Imagination: Stoklewath; or the Cumbrian Village,” *Women’s Writing*, vol. 18, no. 3, 2011, pp. 385–404.
- Blackwood, A. “‘Make the Medick Art my Whole Concern’: Poetry as Women’s Literary Medical Practice.” *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 46, 2023, pp. 21–40.

When Home We Return¹⁵⁰

Air — O Say Bonny Lass, will you lie in a barrack? ¹⁵¹

WHEN home we return, after youth has been spending,
 And many a slow year has been wasting and ending,
 We often seem lost in the once well-known places,
 And sigh to find age has so furrow'd¹⁵² dear faces;
 For the rose that has faded the eye still keeps mourning, 5
 And weeps every change that it sees on returning.

Should we miss but a tree where we us'd to be playing,
 Or find the wood cut where we saunter'd¹⁵³ a-Maying,¹⁵⁴ —
 If the yew-seat's¹⁵⁵ away, or the ivy's awanting,¹⁵⁶
 We hate the fine lawn and the new-fashion'd planting, 10
 Each thing call'd improvement seems blacken'd with crimes
 If it tears up one record of blissful old times.

When many a spring had call'd forth the sweet flowers,
 And many an autumn had painted the bowers,¹⁵⁷
 I came to the place where life had its beginning, 15
 Taking root with the groves that around me were springing;
 When I found them all gone, 'twas like dear friends departed,

¹⁵⁰ *The Poetical Works of Miss Susanna Blamire "The Muse of Cumberland."* collected by Henry Lonsdale, 1842, pp. 193–194. *Eighteenth-Century Poetry Archive*.

¹⁵¹ *Air — O Say Bonny Lass, will you lie in a barrack?*: this is the tune Blamire set the poem to.

¹⁵² *Furrow'd*: marked with lines or wrinkles.

¹⁵³ *Saunter'd*: walked without hurrying.

¹⁵⁴ *A-Maying*: the celebration of May Day.

¹⁵⁵ *Yew-seat's*: a garden bench next to or made from a yew tree.

¹⁵⁶ *Awanting*: missing.

¹⁵⁷ *Bowers*: shady, leafy shelters in a garden or woods.

And I walk'd where they us'd to be half broken hearted!

When distant one bower my fancy¹⁵⁸ still haunted,
 'Twas hung round with woodbine¹⁵⁹ my Jessy¹⁶⁰ had planted 20
 I ran to the spot, where a weak flower remaining
 Could just nod its head to approve my complaining,
 A tear for a dewdrop I hid in its fringes,¹⁶¹
 And sigh'd then to think what one's pleasures unhinges!

But, ah! what is that to the friends oft¹⁶² estranging,¹⁶³ 25
 Their manners still more than their looks daily changing;
 Where the heart us'd to *warm* to find *civil*¹⁶⁴ behaviour,
 Make us wish we had stay'd¹⁶⁵ from our country for ever,
 With the sweet days of youth in our fancies still glowing,
 And the love of old Friends with old Time ever growing! 30



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¹⁵⁸ *Fancy*: imagination.

¹⁵⁹ *Woodbine*: a honeysuckle.

¹⁶⁰ *Jessy*: the female love interest of the speaker of the poem.

¹⁶¹ *Fringes*: the edges of the flowers.

¹⁶² *Oft*: often.

¹⁶³ *Estranging*: no longer close or affectionate to someone.

¹⁶⁴ *Civil*: coldly polite.

¹⁶⁵ *Stay'd*: written with an apostrophe to emphasize the pronunciation with one syllable.